

SUPPORT FOR THE AMENDMENTS

The present amendment cancels claims 1-21, and adds new claims 22-33.

Support for the addition of new claim 22 is found at specification page 4, lines 6-19, page 5, lines 29-39, page 6, lines 1-32, page 8, lines 10-19.

Support for the addition of new claims 23-26 is found at specification page 4, lines 7-19, page 5, lines 35-39, page 6, lines 1 and 28-32.

Support for the addition of new claim 27 is found at specification page 6, lines 17-20, and page 7, lines 1-3.

Support for the addition of new claim 28 is found at specification page 8, lines 5-8.

Support for the addition of new claim 29 is found at specification page 8, lines 21-23.

Support for the addition of new claims 30-33 is found at specification page 7, lines 22-29, as well as original claims 2-7.

It is believed that these amendments have not resulted in the introduction of new matter.

REMARKS

Claims 22-33 are currently pending in the present application. Claims 1-21 have been cancelled, and new claims 22-33 have been added, by the present amendment.

The rejection of claims 1-6 and 8-10 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Rostami (WO00/29480 and U.S. Patent 6,689,832, which is the English language equivalent of thereof) is obviated by amendment with respect to the cancellation of said claims.

The rejection of now cancelled claims 11-21 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Rostami in view of Fraser (U.S. Patent 6,172,135) is obviated by amendment, with respect to new claims 22-33, which incorporates the transitional phrase “consisting essentially of” into new claim 22.

New claim 22 recites an impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition resistant to hot water cycles, wherein the impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition *consists essentially of*: (1) from 70 wt. % to 99 wt. % of a polymethyl methacrylate matrix composition having an average molar mass molecular weight of from 130,000 g/mol to 190,000 g/mol, wherein the polymethyl methacrylate matrix composition comprises: (a) from 80 wt. % to 99.5 wt. % methyl methacrylate; and (b) from 0.5 wt. % to 20.0 wt. % vinylic comonomer; and (2) from 1 wt. % to 15 wt. % of an impact-modifier composition in the form of a crosslinked elastomeric particle, wherein the impact-modifier composition comprises: (a) from 50 wt. % to 70 wt. % methyl methacrylate; (b) from 20 wt. % to 40 wt. % butyl acrylate, butadiene, or both; (c) from 0.1 wt. % to 2 wt. % allyl methacrylate; and (d) from 0.5 wt. % to 5 wt. % vinylic comonomer.

New claim 22 recites the transitional phrase “consisting essentially of” thereby limiting the scope of the impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition to the materials specified therein and to those materials that do not materially effect the basic and novel characteristic thereof. See e.g., MPEP § 2111.03.

As discussed in the present specification and evidenced by the scientific experimental data presented therein (See e.g., page 3, lines 9-17, page 10, lines 4-7, and page 11, lines 21-24), Applicants have discovered that the claimed impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition exhibits superior properties with respect to high surface quality and excellent resistance to hot water cycles, cracking, scratching, and scoring.

Rostami describes an acrylic copolymer composition that necessarily contains mineral filler in substantial amounts of from 10 to 80 wt. % (See e.g., column 1, lines 42-44 and 54-56, column 2, lines 38-45).

Applicants submit that the presence of substantial amounts of mineral filler such as those described in Rostami would materially effect the basic and novel characteristics of the claimed composition by negatively effecting various properties thereof, including, for example, surface quality and resistance to hot water cycles, cracking, scratching, and scoring.

It is well understood by skilled artisans that the presence of substantial amounts of mineral filler within a thermoplastic composition deleteriously effects the properties thereof by increasing surface roughness and oftentimes severely decreasing moisture resistance and impact strength, as evidenced by Ancker (U.S. Patent 4,795,768, a copy of which is enclosed herewith for the Examiner's convenience) (See e.g., column 1, lines 30-49, column 3, lines 3-9, column 4, lines 60-68, column 5, lines 1-6, 23-42 and 52-68, column 6, lines 19-33 and 59-68, column 7, lines 1-2). Ancker attempts to address the deleterious effects associated with including substantial amounts of mineral filler by incorporating interface agents into the thermoplastic composition (See e.g., column 6, lines 19-33). As duly noted by Ancker, the actual selection of particular interface agents for circumventing the negative effects attributable to the presence of substantial amounts of mineral filler within particular mineral filler/resin systems is not understood or predictable by skilled artisans (See e.g., column 6, lines 32 and 33).

Therefore, the presently claimed impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition excludes the presence of the requisite 10-80 wt. % mineral filler that is necessarily present within the acrylic copolymer composition of Rostami because such a substantial amount of mineral filler would materially effect the basic and novel characteristics of the claimed invention. As a result, the impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition of the present invention is *fundamentally different* from the acrylic copolymer composition of Rostami.

While Rostami describes an acrylic copolymer composition further comprising 1-50 wt. % of an MBS toughening agent (See e.g., column 2, lines 58-65), Rostami fails to describe the specific weight percents of the various components within the MBS toughening agent, as acknowledged on page 5, lines 1-3, of the Official Action dated August 10, 2007.

New claim 22 recites, in part, an impact-modifier composition comprising: (a) from 50 wt. % to 70 wt. % methyl methacrylate; (b) from 20 wt. % to 40 wt. % butyl acrylate, butadiene, or both; (c) from 0.1 wt. % to 2 wt. % allyl methacrylate; and (d) from 0.5 wt. % to 5 wt. % vinylic comonomer. New claim 25 recites that the vinylic comonomer is an alkyl methacrylate selected from one or more C₁-C₄ alkyl methacrylates. Therefore, methyl methacrylate is present within the claimed impact-modifier composition in an amount of 50-75 wt. %, when the vinylic comonomer is methyl methacrylate.

Fraser describes an impact-modified (meth)acrylic polymer composition comprising an impact-modifier composition in the form of a core-shell crosslinked particle, wherein the core comprises 80-99 wt. % methyl methacrylate and 1-20 wt. % C₁-C₄ alkyl acrylate (e.g., butyl acrylate), and the shell comprises 0-25 wt. % styrene and 75-100 wt. % (meth)acrylate (See e.g., column 3, lines 46-50 and 59-60, column 4, lines 8-11, 20-21, 54 and 64-67, column 5, lines 1-7, 26-32 and 41-47, column 9, lines 21-30, and claims 1-7 and 12-18). As a result, the amount of methyl methacrylate present within the impact-modifier composition of

Fraser, including the preferred embodiment described therein (See e.g., column 9, lines 21-30), is *clearly outside* the claimed range of 50-75 wt. % methyl methacrylate.

New claims 28 and 29 recite that the impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition exhibits a flowability of about 10.0 cm³/10 minutes and a vicat softening temperature of greater than 105°C, respectively.

Rostami fails to describe the flowability and the vicat softening temperature of the acrylic copolymer composition. Fraser likewise fails to describe the flowability and the vicat softening temperature of the impact-modified (meth)acrylic polymer composition.

A skilled artisan would reasonably expect that the acrylic copolymer composition of Rostami, when combined with the impact-modifier composition of Fraser, would actually possess a different flowability and vicat softening temperature than those claimed. This is especially the case since the presently claimed impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition excludes the presence of the requisite 10-80 wt. % mineral filler that is necessarily present in substantial amounts within the acrylic copolymer composition of Rostami.

In conclusion, the impact-modified polymethyl methacrylate molding composition of the present invention is fundamentally different from the resultant impact-modified acrylic copolymer composition of Rostami in view of Fraser.

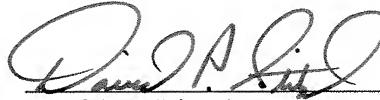
Withdrawal of this ground of rejection is respectfully requested.

The objection to claims 1 and 10 is obviated by amendment with respect to the cancellation of said claims.

In conclusion, Applicants submit that the present application is now in condition for allowance and notification to this effect is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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United States Patent [19]

Ancker et al.

[11] Patent Number: 4,795,768

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[54] IMPACT PROMOTERS FOR MINERAL-FILLED THERMOPLASTICS

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Related U.S. Application Data

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[51] Int. Cl.⁴ C08K 9/00

[52] U.S. Cl. 523/200; 524/145; 524/437; 524/585; 524/586; 524/587

[58] Field of Search 524/400, 145, 437, 585-587; 523/200

[56] References Cited

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4,353,817	10/1982	Nakae et al.	524/400
4,385,136	5/1983	Ancker et al.	523/215
4,409,342	10/1983	Ancker et al.	523/202
4,430,468	2/1984	Schumacher	524/145

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS

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forced Plastics/Composites Inst., Society of the Plastics Industry, Washington, D.C. Feb. 16-20, 1981 Session 9-B Preprints pp. 1-4.

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"Surface Modification of Calcium Carbonate for Polymer Composites", T. Nakatsuka, *Molecular Characterization of Polymer Composites*, H. Ishida and G. Kumar (ed.), New York (Plenum Press), 1985.

"Strain-Rate Sensitive Tough Fibre-Reinforced Composites" J. of Materials Science vol. 12, pp. 239-250 (1977).

"Void Nucleation of Particulate Filled Polymeric Materials" pp. 46-48, 34th Annual Technical Conference of the Society of Plastics Engineers, Boston, May 4-7 (1981).

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[57]

ABSTRACT

A mineral-filled thermoplastic composition is disclosed which comprises polyethylene or an ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer; a mineral filler consisting, in the case of polyethylene, of aluminum trihydrate, magnesium hydrate, calcium carbonate or calcium/magnesium carbonates, and, in the case of the ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer, barium titanite or neodymium titanite; and, in the case of polyethylene, an impact promoter consisting of tri(2-ethylhexyl) phosphate, isostearic acid or dodecylpyridinium salts, the selection of the impact promoter being dependent upon the mineral filler being employed, and, in the case of the ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer, an amount of isostearic acid sufficient to increase the ductility of the composition; also disclosed is an additive composition for a thermoplastic composition which comprises a hydrophobic agent and an impact promoter.

20 Claims, No Drawings

IMPACT PROMOTERS FOR MINERAL-FILLED THERMOPLASTICS

This is a division of prior U.S. application Ser. No. 753,976 filed 7/11/85, now U.S. Pat. No. 4,661,537.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to mineral-filled thermoplastic polymer compositions containing an impact promoter.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The use of mineral fillers for thermoplastic polymer compositions is well known in the art. Such filler compositions are typically used to improve certain physical properties of the matrix polymer. Since mineral fillers often are as costly on a volume basis as the low cost resins such as the polyolefins, fillers are mostly used for the purpose of creating new materials of increased value, due to the altered physical properties as compared to the unfilled polymer matrix.

The filled thermoplastic polymers typically are comprised of the matrix polymer, a mineral filler, and an interface agent. Of importance then is the combination of properties that can be achieved for a given polymer/filler/interface agent system, such combination of properties typically being referred to as a property profile. The property profile thus determines the practical utility of the filled plastic.

The mineral fillers when incorporated into ductile plastics have some beneficial effects with respect to certain physical properties of the filled material while also causing some adverse effects on other aspects of the property profile of the composite material. In general, the addition of mineral fillers increases stiffness, as measured by tensile modulus and flexural modulus, while decreasing elongation at break, otherwise known as ductility, and impact strength, as measured by the notched Izod test. Such decreases in the ductility and impact strength are often severe. The strength properties which result from the addition of a mineral filler to a thermoplastic material may increase or decrease depending upon a number of factors.

Certain interface agents can dramatically improve the property profile of individual polymer/filler systems by lessening the deleterious effects of the filler while preserving the improvements in other properties, such as tensile modulus and flexural modulus. It is also sometimes possible to minimize by the use of certain interface agents, the adverse effects of the environment on a given composition, such as to improve its retention of properties after exposure to water, high temperature, and/or actinic radiation.

For a general background on the physical properties of polymeric materials, with and without particulate fillers, reference is made to the book by Lawrence E. Nielsen entitled "Mechanical Properties of Polymers and Composites", New York (Marcel Dekker) 1974, particularly to chapters 5 and 7, and to the appended bibliography. The specific question of how to simultaneously achieve high modulus, high ductility and impact strength in thermoplastics is discussed in more detail by L. C. Cessna in the article entitled "Dilatometric Studies of Polymers Undergoing High and Low Rate Tensile Deformation", Polymer Engineering and Science, Vol. 14, #10, p. 696-701 (1974), and the reference quoted therein.

The foregoing studies suggest that microcavitation, i.e., microvoid formation during deformation, can result in an enormous increase in the internal surface area during deformation, and that this may be the predominant energy-absorbing mechanism even for unfilled, high modulus, ductile polymer systems at the high strain rates typical of impact testing. For studies of microcavitation in filled systems, further reference is made to the articles by Nam P. Suh et al. entitled "Strain-Rate Sensitive Tough Fibre-Reinforced Composites", J. of Materials Science, Vol. 12, pp. 239-250 (1977), and "Void Nucleation of Particulate Filled Polymeric Materials," pp. 46-48 of the preprints from the 34th Annual Technical Conference of the Society of Plastics Engineers, Boston, May 4-7, 1981, and the reference cited therein. These papers show that interposing a liquid (e.g., silicone grease) interface between a matrix resin and fibers or particular fillers, respectively, can indeed increase the toughness of these composites by facilitating the formation of microvoids. However, the authors clearly recognized the limitations of the approach by stating on page 250 of the former article that the viscous coating reduces the static properties of the composite such as its tensile and flexural strengths and suggested that the concept could best be utilized where the amount of one time energy absorption is the primary design parameter. The approach was useful for products which must be able to resist one impact event only without catastrophic failure, although the material has been damaged to the extent that it will not withstand a second event. Examples of such specialty applications were safety related products such as highway guard rails, safety helmets and circuit breaker boxes.

For a more general discussion of the different types of interface agents and their use in the prior art, reference is made to U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,385,136, issued May 24, 1983, entitled "Reinforcement Promoters for Filled Thermoplastic Polymers" and 4,409,342, issued Oct. 11, 1983, entitled "Synergistic Reinforcement Promoter Systems for Filled Polyolefins" and to the references quoted therein. Effective interface agents for mineral-filled thermoplastics fall into two broad categories, namely those that are chemically active and those that have no chemical groups capable of reaction with the matrix polymer. The first type is believed to work by a mechanism whereby the polymer interphase region surrounding each filler particle is chemically modified by the interface agent so that it becomes considerably tougher than the original matrix resin. The second type, on the other hand, is believed to debond the filler particles from the matrix resin, thus sometimes increasing the toughness by facilitating microcavitation, but usually at a severe sacrifice in both strength and stiffness. Actually, most additives that are presently used as dispersing and processing aids, i.e. most lubricants and surfactants, have only very minor effects on the mechanical properties of the filled polymer.

Many evaluations of additives for filled polymers described in the prior art are misleading because the data are incomplete or misinterpreted. For example, some additives act as plasticizers and thus reduce the stiffness of a given filled thermoplastic by softening the matrix which often is an undesirable effect. On the other hand, an increase in stiffness can be an indication of filler agglomeration—i.e. poor dispersion—hence, a high modulus is not necessarily a beneficial result for a particular additive agent as explained further below. In contrast, since agglomeration invariably reduces the

tensile strength because poorly dispersed fillers cause large flaws, a high tensile strength is always a beneficial interface effect. The property profile which is important for practical utility is a combination of improved impact and ductility, unchanged or only slightly reduced strength and stiffness, and good retention of these properties after environmental exposure to moisture, heat or sunlight. This property combination is also the most difficult one to achieve, especially with interface agents that are incapable of chemical interactions with the matrix resin.

The relationship between particle aggregation and viscosity of suspensions was studied by T. B. Lewis and Lawrence Nielsen and reported in the Transactions of the Society of Rheology, Vol. 12, pp. 421-443 (1968). According to these studies, the viscosity of liquid dispersions (and similarly, the modulus of filled, solid polymers) decreases with improvements in the dispersion of particular fillers. The reason for this is that part of the liquid (or plastic matrix) is entrapped in the interstitial spaces in an agglomerate, hence reducing the amount of free liquid (plastic solid) available for the particles to move in. As the agglomerates are broken down, mechanically and/or by the action of dispersing agents, more liquid (solid) becomes available for the particles to move in and the viscosity (modulus) decreases.

The strength of a material is a statistical property in that the size and distribution of defects or flaws in the specimen determine the magnitude of loading a given sample can withstand before failure. For this reason, large filler particles quite generally result in lower composite strength than smaller ones, and in case of undispersed and mechanically weak agglomerates, the phenomenon is aggravated by the possible breakage of the agglomerates themselves.

Because of the complex mechanisms described above, the practical utility of a potential interface agent requires a quite complete evaluation of the physical property profile of the filler/polymer system in which it is used. Most studies reported in the literature are very incomplete in this respect and considerable caution must therefore be exercised in accepting the statements of the authors.

For a perspective on the prior art for non-reactive interface agents, reference is made to some recent survey articles. Organic titanates have been reviewed extensively by S. J. Monte, G. Sugarman et al. in two papers entitled "The Theory of Organo Titanate Coupling Agents" and "The Application of Titanate Coupling Agents", pp. 27-34 and p. 35-39, respectively, in the preprints of the 34th Annual Technical Conference of the Society of Plastics Engineers, Atlantic City, N.J., Apr. 26-29, 1976. Chlorinated paraffins have been reviewed in a paper entitled "Low cost Filler-Coupling Agent for Polyolefins" by D. Stevenson et al., pp. 1-4 of the preprints for session 9-B of the 36th Annual Conference of the Reinforced Plastics/Composites Institute of the Society of the Plastics Industry, Washington, D.C., Feb. 16-20, 1981. An organic interface agent of undisclosed composition has been discussed by de Souza et al. in a paper entitled "Low Cost Highly Filled Impact Resistant Thermoplastic Composites," pp. 492-496 in the preprints of the 37th Annual Technical Conference of the Society of Plastics Engineers, New Orleans, La., May 7-10, 1979. A detailed overview of surface treatments and preparation techniques for calcium carbonate is presented in an article by T. Nakatsuka entitled "Surface Modification of Calcium Carbon-

ate for Polymer Composites", published in H. Ishida and G. Kumar (ed.), "Molecular Characterization of Polymer Composites", New York (Plenum Press), 1985.

Non-reactive interface agents have some important advantages over the chemically reactive agents referred to above. First, precisely because the chemically non-reactive agents act by physical means only, they are generally much less sensitive to differences in processing conditions, thus making the same composite formulation usable for many different fabrication processes. Second, they are for the same reason generally very low in toxicity, which has advantages both in handling and in certain, critical applications of filled polymers. Third, in contrast to the chemically reactive agents, which usually do not give additive effects by simple combination with a non-reactive agent, all non-reactive species can often be combined with themselves with beneficial results: for example, highly hydrophobic interface agents will usually convey improved moisture resistance to a filled polymer when substituted for part of a less hydrophobic impact promoter without significant sacrifice in the other physical properties.

As polyethylene is one of the most widely used low cost resins, a need continually exists for improving the property profile of polyethylene based resins. It has been well known to use mineral fillers in combination with a polyethylene-type matrix polymer to increase its tensile modulus and flexural modulus. However, to date, there continues to exist a need for non-reactive interface agents, generally, and in particular for non-reactive interface agents which are capable of increasing the impact strength of such mineral-filled polyethylene-type resins while not substantially adversely affecting the strength and modulus of the filled polyethylene-type resin. The need continues to exist, in part, because of the lack of predictability of the efficacy of any individual non-reactive interface agent when combined with any particular combination of resin and filler.

One may refer, for example, to U.S. Pat. No. 4,385,136, which in Table III, Columns 11 and 12, lists a dozen typical, non-reactive chemicals. The subsequent examples demonstrate that such chemicals when used as additives in filled polyolefins typically do not provide composite materials with attractive and useful property profiles. For example, Example 1, Table 1 Column 19 shows that isopropyl tri-isostearyl titanate severely reduces strength, stiffness and impact, while increasing ductility in aluminum trihydrate filled polyethylene. As another illustration, Example 3, Table 3, Column 20, demonstrates that iso-stearic acid, while improving the impact strength, has little effect on the strength, stiffness, and ductility over a control sample without such an additive, in clay filled high density polyethylene.

An object of the present invention is to provide non-reactive impact promoters which are useful in conjunction with certain combinations of mineral fillers and resins.

Another object of the present invention is to provide non-reactive impact promoters which are useful in increasing the impact strength of certain mineral filled resins, when compared to the same compositions without said promoter.

Additionally, an object of the present invention is to provide a method for improving the impact strength of a mineral filled resin composition without substantially impairing the strength and modulus of said composition.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a method for concurrently reducing the moisture sensitivity of a mineral-filled resin composition while improving the impact strength of said composition, without substantially impairing the strength and modulus of the composition

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention there have now been discovered certain mineral-filled thermoplastic compositions comprising a polymer selected from the group consisting of polyethylene and ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymers; an appropriate mineral filler selected from the group consisting of aluminum trihydrate, magnesium hydrate, calcium carbonate, calcium/magnesium carbonates, barium titanate and neodymium titanate; and a sufficient amount of an appropriate impact promoter selected from the group consisting of tri(2-ethylhexyl) phosphate, isostearic acid, and dodecylpyridinium salts, to increase the impact strength of the composition when compared to the same composition without said promoter being present.

There has also been discovered a method for improving the impact strength of a composition wherein said composition comprises a polymer selected from the group consisting of polyethylene and ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymers, and an appropriate mineral filler selected from the group consisting of aluminum trihydrate, magnesium hydrate, calcium carbonate, calcium/magnesium carbonates, barium titanate and neodymium titanate, said method comprising incorporating into said composition a sufficient amount of an appropriate impact promoter selected from the group consisting of tri(2-ethylhexyl) phosphate, isostearic acid, and dodecylpyridinium salts, to improve the impact strength of said composition without substantially impairing the strength or modulus, as compared to the same composition without said impact promoter.

Surprisingly, it has been found that there is a great deal of selectivity with respect to the choice of an impact promoter for any particular polymer/filler combination. Thus, when the polymer is polyethylene and the filler is aluminum trihydrate or magnesium hydrate, the appropriate impact promoter is tri(2-ethylhexyl) phosphate. When the polymer is polyethylene and the filler is calcium carbonate or a calcium/magnesium carbonate, the appropriate impact promoter is either isostearic acid or a dodecylpyridinium salt. Finally, when the polymer is an ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer and the filler is barium titanate or neodymium titanate, the appropriate impact promoter is isostearic acid.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, it has been found that certain mineral-filled thermoplastic compositions can have their impact strength improved in accordance with the aforementioned invention, while also having their sensitivity to moisture reduced by incorporating into said composition a sufficient amount of an appropriate impact promoter to improve the impact strength of said mineral-filled composition and a sufficient amount of a hydrophobic agent to cause a reduction in moisture sensitivity, as compared to the same mineral-filled composition without said impact promoter and hydrophobic agent. Advantageously, such a combined effect of improvement in impact strength and reduction in moisture sensitivity can be achieved for the particular mineral-filled compositions specified herein with an additive composition comprising a hydrophobic agent and an impact

promoter selected from the group consisting of tri(2-ethylhexyl) phosphate, isostearic acid, and dodecylpyridinium salts, wherein the weight ratio of hydrophobic agent to impact promoter is from about 1:20 to about 1:1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

As suggested above, one of the findings of the present invention is that certain combinations of non-reactive interface agents, sometimes referred to herein as impact promoters, along with certain mineral fillers are effective in producing certain thermoplastic compositions having improved property profiles, especially increased impact strength, as measured by the notched Izod test, without substantially impairing the strength or modulus, as compared to the same composition without said impact promoter. One of the surprising aspects of the present invention was the finding that the efficacy of the particular interface agents is highly dependent upon the particular combination of both filler and polymer type. Thus, it has been found that an interface agent which is useful in conjunction with one particular type of mineral filler, such as calcium carbonate or calcium/magnesium carbonates, and one particular polymer, such as polyethylene, may not be, and probably will not be, effective for a different mineral filler such as clay or talc and the same polymer, or for the same filler type and a different polymer, such as polypropylene. The reason for the selectivity of the particular interface agent and the particular filler/resin systems is not understood or predictable, at the present state of the art.

The polyethylenes used in the present invention are the normally solid grades of polyethylene and the non-polar copolymers of ethylene with other hydrocarbon monomers such as propylene, butene, hexene, neohexene and 4-methyl pentene. The polyethylene may further contain residual unsaturation enabling subsequent curing or cross-linking as can be achieved, for example by co- or terpolymerization with diene monomers such as ethylidene norbornene.

Specifically preferred are the commercially available, normally solid, grades of polyethylene. A preferred grade is high-pressure, low-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.91 to about 0.94 and a melt index of about 0.1 to about 50. Another preferred polyethylene is linear, low-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.90 to about 0.94 and a melt index of about 0.01 to about 50. A most preferred polyethylene is high-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.94 to about 0.97 and a melt index of about 0.01 to about 50, preferably 0.05 to 10.

The ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymers used in the present invention are the normally solid copolymers of ethylene with vinyl acetate, wherein the vinyl acetate content is from about 2 to about 50 percent, usually from about 5 to about 40 percent, by weight.

The mineral fillers which are useful in the present invention, as stated above, are aluminum trihydrate, magnesium hydrate, calcium carbonate, calcium/magnesium carbonates, barium titanate and neodymium titanate. Illustrative of carbonate mineral fillers are the natural calcite, dolomite, and limestone products (calcium and magnesium carbonates) which may be ground or provided in precipitated ("synthetic") forms. The amount of mineral filler, by weight, present in any composition of the present invention is usually from about 5

to about 85 percent, typically from about 10 to about 65 percent.

The non-reactive interface agents which are useful as impact promoters in the context of the present invention are tri(2-ethylhexyl) phosphate, isostearic acid, and dodecylpyridinium salts. The dodecylpyridinium salts which are useful in the present invention include dodecylpyridinium halides, such as dodecylpyridinium chloride, as well as dodecylpyridinium sulfate, dodecylpyridinium acetate, and other known salts.

The amount of impact promoter present in any given composition, should be sufficient to increase the impact strength of the composition, when compared to the same composition without said promoter being present. The impact promoters of the present invention can thus substantially increase the impact strength of the specific mineral-filled compositions. A substantial increase in impact strength can be determined by considering the notched Izod values of the mineral-filled compositions, both with and without the presence of the impact promoters.

Materials having notched Izod values equal to or less than 0.5 ft. lbs. per inch of notch are sufficiently brittle so that they will crack upon falling from table height onto a hard floor. Materials having notched Izod values of about 1 ft. lb. per inch of notch are commonly recognized as being "non-brittle", although perhaps not quite considered "tough". Materials having notched Izod values around 2 ft. lbs. per inch of notch will normally withstand being dropped onto a hard floor from table height. Materials having notched Izod values equal to or greater than 5 ft. lbs. per inch of notch are difficult to break when hit with a hammer. A "substantial improvement in impact strength" is thus one which is noticeable within the foregoing practical scale.

It is an especially advantageous feature of the present invention that the impact promoter, when selected in accordance with the present invention and used in a suitable amount, will have the aforementioned beneficial result on impact strength without substantially impairing the strength or modulus, as compared to the same composition without said promoter. A substantial impairment of strength or modulus would be indicated by a greater than one-third reduction of both strength and stiffness values, as compared to the same mineral-filled composition without the interface agent. Because non-reactive interface agents act by the mechanism of microcavitation, such reductions in the static properties imply that the material might fail in some practical applications, due to reduced strength or due to excessive creep, under long-term static loads.

Usually, the promoter will be present in an amount, based upon the weight of the filler, from about 0.5 to about 10 percent, typically about 1 to about 5 percent.

In an embodiment of the process of the present invention, the impact promoters may be admixed with the filler by stirring the promoter with the filler, using a solution containing a solvent which is allowed to evaporate before compounding the filler into the thermoplastic polymer. This is done to assure uniformity of distribution for the various impact promoters onto the fillers since the chemicals vary greatly in physical form, i.e., liquid vs. solid, in viscosity, melting point and the like. In practice, less expensive methods are preferred. These methods would include the impact promoter being used as a filler pretreatment, e.g., from an aqueous dispersion by spray-tumbling in a ribbon blender; by mechanically mixing the promoter at high shear as a liquid or solid

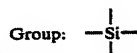
which is predispersed or dissolved in other ingredients, if any; by direct addition of the promoter to the resin and filler before or during compounding; or as a concentrate in the polymer.

The filler and impact promoter may be dispersed in the polymer by processes such as banburying, milling, extrusion-including twin screw extrusion and the like. The hydrophobic agents may likewise be added in a manner similar to that described above for the impact promoters.

The hydrophobic agents used in the present invention, as indicated, may be present in an amount which is sufficient to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition. Moisture sensitivity of a composition is usually shown, for example, by loss of mechanical properties upon exposure to moisture, as water or water vapor. A typical result of moisture sensitivity would be embrittlement of the composition upon exposure to moisture. The hydrophobic agents of the present invention thus reduce the tendency of the compositions to lose mechanical properties upon exposure to moisture.

In the context of this invention, a hydrophobic agent is defined as a chemical with a non-polar moiety having a polarity lower than that of polyethylene. The polarity of a moiety can be calculated in terms of the Hildebrand solubility parameter by the method of group contributions; see, for example, D. W. Van Krevelen, *Properties of Polymers*, 2nd Edition, Amsterdam/New York (Elsevier), 1976. Since there is some variation in values for group contributions (F-value=molar attraction constant) and in molar volumes (cm^3/mole) among different authors, those of Van Krevelen in tables 4.4, page 56 and Table 7.2, page 134 are specified.

Furthermore, since tetravalent silicon is not listed in the tables discussed above, the values for this group are listed below:



Molar Attraction Constant:

$$64 \text{ Joule}^{\frac{1}{2}}\text{-cm}^{\frac{3}{2}} \text{ per mole} = 32 \text{ cal}^{\frac{1}{2}}\text{-cm}^{\frac{3}{2}} \text{ per mole}$$

Molar Volume: $29.1 \text{ cm}^3/\text{mole}$

Among moieties having solubility parameters lower than that of polyethylene—which is $8.3 \text{ cal}^{\frac{1}{2}}\text{-cm}^{-\frac{3}{2}}$ —trimethyl silyl, dimethyl siloxyl, poly(dimethylsiloxane), perfluoromethyl, poly(tetrafluoroethylene), isobutenyl, poly(isobutene), butadienyl, poly(butadiene), etc.

The hydrophobic agent may have a hydrophilic moiety which can be ionic or non-ionic. Typical anionic groups are carboxylate, sulfonate, phosphate, and the like, while typical cationic groups may be amines or quaternized ammonium. Examples of non-ionic groups are ethers, alcohols and esters, e.g. ethylene oxide, carbohydrates, etc. However, the original hydrophobic agent need not contain such hydrophilic moieties since they can be formed by oxidation during the hot compounding operation of the filled thermoplastic polymer. Of particular utility are hydrophobic agents as discussed above, which are either organosilicon based or organofluorine based.

The hydrophobic agents used in the present invention are usually present in combination with the impact pro-

motors of the present invention such that from about 5 to about 50 percent of the combination is the hydrophobic agent and from about 50 to about 95 percent of the combination is the impact promoter. Preferably, the weight ratio of the hydrophobic agent to the impact promoter is from about 1:1 to about 1:9, more preferably about 1:4 to about 1:9.

The present invention will be further described by the following examples which are for the purpose of further illustrating the present invention and are not intended to be a limitation thereon.

PREPARATION OF THE SAMPLES

Except as otherwise indicated, in all of the following examples, the filler pretreatment procedure consisted of dissolving about 10 g of impact promoter in enough solvent, e.g., acetone, to dissolve the promoter, but less than the amount of solvent which would produce a paste with the wetted filler. The promoter solution was then added to 500 g of filler, blended mechanically and air dried overnight.

The pretreated filler was compounded with 250 g of thermoplastic polymer on a 6" by 12" 2-roll mill at 180° C. by adding 250 g of pretreated filler incrementally to the fluxed polymer. Mixing was continued using thorough compounding procedures. A sheet of the treated, filled polymer was then cut and rolled into a cylindrical bar, i.e. "pig", and then passed end-wise through the compounding mill about ten times for a total mixing time of ten minutes after the filler had been added. The product composition was then sheeted off the mill, allowed to cool to room temperature and granulated in a granulator.

TESTING OF THE SAMPLES

The following testing procedures were used for each product composition. The granulated product composition was injected molded at a melt temperature of 215° C. using a 38 cm³ capacity, 30 ton reciprocating screw-injection machine with a mold providing an ASTM dog bone test bar with dimensions of 2" by 1/2" by 1/8" for testing tensile properties, and a rectangular bar with dimensions of 5" by 1/2" by 1/8" for testing flexural properties. The following tests were used for each product composite:

Property Tested	Abbrev.	ASTM Test Units	Designation
Tensile Strength	TS	psi	D638-76
Tensile Modulus	TM	ksi	D638-76
Elongation at Break	EB	%	D638-76
Flexural Strength	FS	psi	D790-71
Flexural Modulus	FM	ksi	D790-71
Notched Izod Impact Strength	IZOD	ft. lbs./in.	D256-73
Heat Distortion Temperature	HDT	°C. (264 psi)	D648-72

During the tension and flexural tests a cross-head speed of 0.2" per minute was utilized.

DEFINITIONS

The chemical designations used in the examples are defined as follows:

Designation	Description
ATH	Aluminum Trihydrate having an average particle size of 0.3 to 1.0 μ m and a surface area of 6 to 15 m ² /g.
BaTiO ₃	Barium titanate in the form of a finely ground ceramic powder having a maximum particle size of 1.0 μ m.
CaCO ₃	Calcium Carbonate consisting of finely ground limestone having 93 to 96 percent Calcium Carbonate in the form of Calcite having an average particle size of 3.5 μ m.
Clay	An unmodified hard clay consisting of hydrous kaolinite with a mean particle size of 0.3 μ m and a surface area of 20 to 24 m ² /g.
CSTA	Calcium Stearate
DDPC	Dodecyl Pyridinium Chloride
EDMS	Ethoxylated Poly(Dimethyl Siloxane)
EVA	A copolymer of ethylene and vinyl acetate containing 75 and 25 wt % of the two monomers, respectively, and having a melt index of 0.1.
HDPE	A high density polyethylene having a density of 0.959 g/cc and a melt index of 0.7
ISTA	Isostearic Acid
ITIT	Isopropyl Tri-isostearyl Titanate
ODTS	Octadecyl Trimethoxy Silane
OA	Oleic Acid
OTS	Octyl Trimethoxy Silane
PFAE	Perfluoroalkyl Polyoxyethylene Ethanol
PFAI	Perfluoroalkyl Quaternary Ammonium Iodide
PFAP	Perfluoroalkyl polyester
PFOA	Perfluorooctanoic Acid Ammonium Salt
PP	A polypropylene homopolymer having a density of 0.905 g/cc and melt flow of 5.0 dg/min.
STA	Stearic Acid
Talc	A natural, asbestos-free magnesium silicate containing 98 percent talc with a mean particle size of 1.5 μ m and a surface area of 172/g.
TOF	Tri(2-Ethyl Hexyl) Phosphate
ZSTA	Zinc Stearate

EXAMPLE #1

(Comparative)

Unfilled Polymers

This example demonstrates the typical property profile of the polyethylene and polypropylene polymers used in the subsequent examples, when no filler or interface agent is present.

The high density polyethylene and the polypropylene homopolymer used in the following samples were milled, injection molded and tested except that no filler or interface agents were added. The results were as follows:

Polymer	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
HDPE	2920	113	3890	161	13	43	408
PP	4308	221	7052	313	0.7	61	43

The foregoing data enables comparison with data for the filled polymers in the subsequent examples to illustrate the improved mechanical properties which can be achieved when using selected fillers in combination with the proper impact promoters of this invention.

EXAMPLE #2

ATH/HDPE

This example shows the utility of TOF as an impact promoter for aluminum trihydrate filled HDPE, in comparison to some conventional treatments.

Aluminum Trihydrate (ATH) filled HDPE (50 wt. % filler) samples, the ATH having been pretreated with the agents listed below, were prepared and tested with the results being as follows:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
None*	3120	279	6440	447	2.0	62	36
TOF	3300	211	4690	313	9.4	49	43
ITIT*	2930	180	5410	294	0.8	52	27
CSTA*	3340	286	5140	389	2.9	56	68
EDMS*	3210	242	6700	421	3.7	54	7

*Comparative

The data shows that TOF is a most effective impact promoter for this filler/polymer system, increasing the notched Izod strength from two to over nine ft. lbs./inch of notch as compared to the control sample with no treatment agent. This substantial increase in toughness occurs at little expense in strength. The stiffness, although reduced relative to that of the untreated control, is still well above that of the unfilled polymer as seen by comparison with the data in Example 1. In contrast, conventional treatments such as Calcium Stearate or the titanate lubricant ITIT only modestly increase or even reduce the toughness as compared to the untreated filler. EDMS, an ethoxylated dimethyl siloxane fluid with 7-8 ethylene oxide units/molecule, is also superior to CSTA and ITIT. Furthermore, EDMS provides superior retention of composite physical properties after extended exposure to water. This effect is observed also in TOF/EDMS blends enabling formulations which have superior property combinations than those achievable with each material by itself as illustrated in Example 9 below.

EXAMPLE #3

CaCO₃/HDPE

This example shows the utility of dodecylpyridinium chloride as an impact promoter for calcium carbonate filled HDPE, in comparison to other treatments.

The following samples were prepared and tested as in Example 2 except that the filler was CaCO₃:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
None*	2290	248	5110	345	1.4	55	34
DDPC	2780	194	4720	335	4.6	50	29
ODTS*	3270	266	6130	411	2.2	57	28
PFAE*	2620	215	5030	395	2.1	49	72
PFOA*	2660	215	5240	422	2.0	51	55

*Comparative

The data shows that DDPC is a superior impact promoter for CaCO₃ in HDPE, giving more than a tripling in impact strength as compared to untreated filler with good retention of strength and stiffness, particularly in flexure. The three silane and fluoroalkyl compounds are less beneficial for impact, although other mechanicals are quite good. Again, the combination of DDPC with the latter hydrophobic agents results in impact promoter formulations providing superior water resistance with only minor loss of the excellent impact contribution provided by straight DDPC.

EXAMPLE #4

CaCO₃/HDPE

This example shows the utility of isostearic acid as an impact promoter for calcium carbonate filled HDPE, in comparison to other treatments.

The samples shown in the following table were prepared and tested as described in Example 3:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
None*	2990	248	5110	345	1.4	55	34
ISTA	2610	198	5040	401	4.2	49	99
OTS*	2810	223	5290	379	2.9	54	54
EDMS*	2700	208	5160	357	3.0	46	42
PFAI*	2610	193	5050	413	3.5	47	75

*Comparative

ISTA is shown to be an excellent impact promoter for CaCO₃ in HDPE, tripling the impact strength while retaining acceptable strength and stiffness. Two silanes and one fluoroalkyl compound are seen to provide good over-all properties, although the impact improvement is somewhat less than that offered by ISTA. The combination of ISTA with silicones, or fluoroalkyl agents again provides superior water resistance as compared to ISTA by itself. These results are markedly superior to those attainable with STA or metal stearates.

EXAMPLE #5

(Comparative)

Clay/HDPE

This comparative example demonstrates that isostearic acid is not effective in clay-filled HDPE, as an impact promoter.

These samples were prepared as those of Example 3 except that hydrous clay was used instead of calcium carbonate:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
None	3640	265	6740	508	0.7	70	26
ISTA	3520	281	6670	569	1.1	58	26

The foregoing data shows that ISTA is not effective in clay-filled high density polyethylene in spite of its excellent performance on calcium carbonate in the same polymer, as shown in Example 3.

EXAMPLE #6

(Comparative)

Talc/HDPE

This comparative example demonstrates that isostearic acid is not an effective impact promoter for talc-filled HDPE.

The samples shown below were prepared as those in Example 4 except that talc was used as the filler:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
None	4160	339	7600	673	1.6	70	33
ISTA	4170	312	7540	849	1.2	65	33
ZSTA	4120	333	7770	639	1.4	77	5

The foregoing data shows that ISTA is no better than zinc stearate when used on talc in the same polymer as before, again illustrating the surprising specificity of the non-reactive impact promoters of this invention.

EXAMPLE #7

(Comparative)

ATH/PP

This comparative example demonstrates that tri (2-ethylhexyl) phosphate is not an effective impact promoter for ATH-filled polypropylene.

These samples were prepared as those in Example 3 except that polypropylene was used as the polymer:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
TOF	3270	272	5940	384	0.8	65	6
STA	3210	307	6050	479	0.8	69	61
CSTA	3230	314	6180	504	0.9	66	24

The foregoing data shows again the surprising specificity of the impact promoters. In spite of the excellent performance in ATH-filled HDPE as shown in Example 2, TOF is no better than stearic acid or calcium stearate in ATH-filled polypropylene.

EXAMPLE #8

(Comparative)

CaCO₃/PP

This comparative example shows that isostearic acid is not an effective impact promoter for calcium carbonate-filled polypropylene.

The samples below were prepared as described in Example 4 except that polypropylene was used as the polymer:

Treating Agent	TS	TM	FS	FM	Izod	HDT	EB
None	4065	266	6885	402	0.5	72	33
ISTA	2520	220	5930	437	0.5	76	98

Again it is seen that, although ISTA is an excellent impact promoter for CaCO₃ in HDPE as shown in Example 4, it is quite ineffective with the same filler in polypropylene homopolymer.

EXAMPLE #9

ATH/HDPE

This example shows that by using both an impact promoter and a hydrophobic agent in accordance with the present invention, an ATH mineral-filled composition can be obtained which will have a reduced sensitivity to moisture, along with good mechanical properties.

ATH (50 wt %) was compounded into HDPE by the same procedure as in Example #2 except that the samples were sheeted off the mill (10 mils thickness) and allowed to cool to room temperature instead of being injection molded.

In addition to the ATH, samples were prepared containing TOF an impact promoter, EDMS as a hydrophobic agent, and both TOF and EDMS, as shown below where the percentages are by weight based upon the weight of the ATH. Strips of the various formulations were then immersed in 95° C. water for 7 days, after which they were removed, allowed to cool to

room temperature, and manually inspected with the following results:

Treating Agent 1	Treating Agent 2	Mechanicals After Water Aging
None	None	Brittle
TOF (2%)	None	Brittle
EDMS (2%)	None	Flexible
TOF (1.8%)	EDMS (0.2%)	Fairly Flexible

The foregoing demonstrates that beneficial water resistance can be obtained by the addition of EDMS, eve as a minor component, to ATH-filled polyethylene.

At this level, no discernible effect on mechanicals were seen before water exposure.

EXAMPLE #10

CaCO₃/HDPE

This example shows that by using both an impact promoter and a hydrophobic agent in accordance with the present invention, a CaCO₃ mineral-filled composition can be obtained which will have a reduced sensitivity to moisture, along with good mechanical properties.

CaCO₃ was compounded into HDPE and tested as described in Example #9 except that the hot water exposure was for 48 hours. In addition to the CaCO₃, samples were prepared containing ISTA as an impact promoter, PFAP as a hydrophobic agent, and both CaCO₃ and PFAP, as shown below where the percentages are by weight based upon the weight of the CaCO₃. The results were as follows:

Treating Agent 1	Treating Agent 2	Mechanicals After Water Aging
None	None	Brittle
ISTA (2%)	None	Fairly Brittle
PFAP (2%)	None	Very Flexible
ISTA (1.8%)	PFAP (0.2%)	Flexible

Again, the beneficial effect of PFAP is obtained even when used as a minor component together with ISTA in polyethylene. No impairment of mechanicals over straight ISTA was observed before water exposure.

EXAMPLE #11

BaTiO₃/EVA

This example shows that EVA containing barium titanate as a mineral filler may have its ductility increased by the addition of isostearic acid.

The samples listed below were prepared as follows: 1000 g of BaTiO₃ powder was charged to a laboratory blender to which was added 70 g of one of the liquid additives listed below. After 15 minutes of mixing, 940 g of the treated BaTiO₃ was removed for later use. Separately, 60 g of EVA resin was fluxed on a 6×12 inch two-roll mill at a roll temperature of 180° F. After the resin had softened sufficiently, the 940 g of treated BaTiO₃ (or 875 g in case of untreated BaTiO₃) was incrementally added on the mill until a coherent mixture was obtained. The hot blend was then fed to an "inverted L" 8×6 inch four roll calender operated at the following roll temperatures: offset roll 180° F., top roll 185° F., middle roll 190° F. and bottom roll 195° F. The processability and resulting film quality (5 mil thickness) are shown below:

Treating Agent	Processability	Film Quality
None	Not Processable	No Film
ISTA	Good	Flexible
STA*	Poor	Brittle
OA	Poor	Brittle

*(pre-heated blender)

In spite of the extremely high filler loadings, the ISTA-formulation produced a flexible film that could be wound and handled without difficulty. In contrast, the STA and OA-containing films could be made only with great difficulty and produced very fragile films with many defects. The control sample without any filler treatment resulted in such a "dry" mix that no film could be made.

The example shows another case of specific efficacy of ISTA. BaTiO₃ films with minimum binder contents are useful in the manufacture of electronic components such as ceramic capacitors. Since the products are pyrolyzed and fired in later fabrication steps, a low content of organic binder is desirable to minimize gas formation with associated risks of generating porosity in the final ceramic products.

The foregoing examples illustrate, for mineral-filled polyethylene, the excellent improvements in impact strength with good retention of tensile strength and stiffness (flexural modulus) which can be obtained by the selection of the specific impact promoters in accordance with this invention, depending upon the particular mineral filler which is present.

The examples further show that by the specific use of isostearic acid in ethylene-vinyl acetate compositions which are filled with barium titanate or neodymium titanate, an improvement in the ductility of the filled composition can be achieved in accordance with the present invention. Combinations of the straight impact promoters with selected hydrophobic agents, which in themselves show good mechanical response, provide impact promoter blends which lend superior water resistance to the filled polymer systems. The examples show also that these effects are quite specific to the individual, selected filler/polymer systems, for which the treating agents were developed.

What is claimed is:

1. A mineral-filled thermoplastic composition comprising polyethylene and a mineral filler selected from the group consisting of calcium carbonate and calcium/magnesium carbonates, said mineral filler being pretreated with a sufficient amount of dodecylpyridinium salts as an impact promoter to increase the impact strength of the composition when compared to the same composition without said promoter being present.

2. The composition of claim 1 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

3. The composition of claim 1 wherein the impact promoter is present in an amount from about 0.5 to about 10 percent, based on the total weight of the mineral filler.

4. The composition of claim 1 wherein the mineral filler is calcium carbonate.

5. The composition of claim 4 wherein the polyethylene is high-density polyethylene having a density of

about 0.94 to about 0.96 and a melt index of about 0.01 to about 50.

6. The composition of claim 5 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

7. The composition of claim 4 wherein the polyethylene is high-pressure, low-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.91 to about 0.94 and a melt index of about 0.1 to about 50.

8. The composition of claim 7 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

9. The composition of claim 4 wherein the polyethylene is linear, low-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.90 to about 0.94 and a melt index of about 0.01 to about 50.

10. The composition of claim 9 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

11. The composition of claim 3 wherein the mineral filler is a calcium magnesium carbonate.

12. The composition of claim 11 wherein the polyethylene is high-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.94 and to about 0.96 and a melt index of about 0.01 to about 50.

13. The composition of claim 12 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

14. The composition of claim 11 wherein the polyethylene is high-pressure, low-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.91 to about 0.94 and a melt index of about 0.1 to about 50.

15. The composition of claim 14 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

16. The composition of claim 11 wherein the polyethylene is linear, low-density polyethylene having a density of about 0.90 to about 0.94 and a melt index of about 0.01 to about 50.

17. The composition of claim 16 further comprising a hydrophobic agent which is present in a sufficient amount to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

18. A method for improving the impact strength of a composition, wherein said composition comprises polyethylene and a mineral filler selected from the group consisting of calcium carbonate and calcium/magnesium carbonates, said method comprising pretreating said mineral filler with a sufficient amount of dodecylpyridinium salts as an impact promoter, to improve the impact strength of said composition without substantially impairing the strength or modulus, as compared to the same composition without said impact promoter.

19. The method of claim 18 also comprising incorporating into said composition a sufficient amount of a hydrophobic agent to reduce the moisture sensitivity of the composition.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein said impact promoter is present in an amount from about 0.5 to about 10 percent, based upon the total weight of the composition.

* * * * *